DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 768 CS 202 625

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TITLE The Berne Model and Advertising Messages: A Psychographic Study.
PUB DATE Aug 75
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (Ottawa, Canada, August 1975); Appendix B may not reproduce well due to type size

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Science Research; College Students; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Mass Media; Media Research; *Personality Theories; *Persuasive Discourse; Psychological Studies; Psychological Testing; *Publicize
IDENTIFIERS Berne (Eric); *Transactional Analysis

ABSTRACT

This study relates Eric Berne's theory of Transactional Analysis to the effectiveness of advertising messages. A 30 item Personality Mode Test was constructed in order to assess subject agreement with statements reflecting Berne's three personality states: parent (social evaluative), adult (controlled rationality), and child (emotiveness). After this test was administered to 215 University of Texas students, the same group was given another self-report form assessing the persuasiveness of certain advertising messages, judged to be coming from either parent, adult, or child modes, or some bi-modal combination. Parent personalities correlated most highly with parent-child messages, next with parent messages, and negatively with parent-adult messages. Child personalities correlated most highly with child messages, and negatively with adult messages. Adult personalities correlated with parent-adult messages most highly, with an inverse relationship with child and child-adult messages. The results of this inquiry suggest that message categories in terms of the Berne model hold promise of being useful for both the advertising practitioner and the communications researcher, although it must be noted that the data reflect verbal behavior and not real-world behavior. (TS)

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THE BERNE MODEL AND ADVERTISING MESSAGES:

A PSYCHOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

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Introduction

Psychological models of personality have often been used as constructs to explain communication behaviors. Such models lay greater or lesser claim to explanation of behavioral variance over time through differing situations.

Several psychological constructs seem to have obtained the prerequisites making them appropriate to the study of individual differences in response to persuasive messages. In general, such models often provide self-report instrumentation that allows formal accounting of salient variables. Such instruments have been used by Koponen (1957), who, for instance, studied the influence of demographic factors of responses to the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. Preston (1970) discussed high and low involvement, stemming from Krugman. Settle and Mizerski (1973) reported on typologies as described by the Kassarjian I-O Scale. Also reported was a study by Kernan and Heiman (1972), utilizing an MPI (Maudsley) test, while Dolich (1969) reported investigation of Rogers' typology of self-actualization. Often the term "psychographics" is used to describe the focus of such studies, in which personality variables are used to define and segment consumer markets.

One may note that many such instruments present information that accounts for only a portion of consumer behavior in response to messages. However, personality models that alledgedly account for a more significant portion of behaviors often lack precision of application.

One model that purports to comprise the whole of personality was devised by Freud. His personality states of Id, Ego, and Superego expressed intuitive, subjective notions about the fundamental modes of behavior.

Recently, a more explicit and discrete neo-Freudian model has been provided by Transactional Analysis psychology. The model (Berne, 1973) is naive, intuitive and parsimonious.

In this model, the individual may be viewed as containing three different modes of behavior, termed ego states: 1) the Parent, which is both nurturing and restrictive; 2) the Adult, in which resides objective, rational thought and goal-orientation; and 3) the Child, in which resides the feelings, fears, expectations and other emotions of the child. Such modes are stated as being unambiguous and deterministic; at any one point in time, one is said to dominate the personality "system."

Such model allows one to ask, does the Child buy the flashy convertible? Does the Adult buy the sensible work clothing? Does the Parent buy the strong mouthwash?

Of particular interest to the communicator is the point that these ego states or modes are identified in terms of the messages they send. The Parent speaks in cliches, uses dogmatic value judgements, etc. The Child states his feelings and demands immediate gratification. The Adult issues rational, objective, and analytical statements of fact.

Evidence tending to confirm the existence of such message modes has been presented by Thomson (1970). Naive subjects produced high inter-rater agreement reliabilities in classifying messages according to the Berne model. Apparently such modes were observable not only in interpersonal messages, but in the messages sent through tape or written materials. In other words, channel of transmission does not seem to confound the identification of modes.

Can advertising messages be so identified? And, further, do such messages have regular and lawful effects upon varying personality types? For instance, does a Parent message have greater promise for a mouthwash? If there is an interaction effect, however, perhaps a Child personality may tend to avoid a Parent message. Or what?

The Research Question

The essential research question is, do such behavioral models exist--with significantly differing effects--among differing personalities, in relation to advertising messages? Given this as the fundamental question, one may then ask, can a self-report personality instrument be constructed that provides ordinal measures of such modes?

One may note that messages are not only single-mode. Many contain at least two of the modes. Thus investigation would seem to be required of three single-mode messages and three bi-mode messages.

Methodology

Construction of the Personality Mode Test was guided by criteria established in Cronbach (1970), Edwards (1970), Veldman (1968), and Guilford and Fruchter (1973).

One hundred twenty statements were drawn from the "universe" of attributes that rationally relate to the three ego states. A group of five judges independently rated each statement, and assigned each statement to a category. Uncertain statements were discarded. A set of 59 statements was thus obtained. Sixty-seven students at the University of Texas were then administered a self-report personality inventory comprised of these statements. Factor analysis was then undertaken to obtain a more parsimonious set of variables that would provide personality mode scores.

In line with the theoretical assumptions of the Berne model, a three-factor structure was obtained. Data was utilized in Program FACTOR, in a prindple-axis procedure using orthogonal Varimax rotation of factor axis. A 30-statement was constructed, with ten scales loading on each factor to represent each mode of personality. Finally, Alpha coefficients of reliability were obtained (Appendix A). The resulting Personality Mode Test (Appendix B) allows one to observe the ordinal relations between mode strengths of the individual, when raw scores are converted to standard scores.

In regard to the advertising message test, one was acnieved that contained advertising messages concerning thirty consumer products. Such listing of products drew upon a study by Hamm and Cundiff (1969), among others.

Essentially, a multiple-choice self-report instrument was prepared, in which each subject was asked to indicate which of six differing messages would most probably cause him or her to select each of thirty given products. In this manner, verbal behavior was assumed to correlate in a significant direction with probable consumer behavior (Bauer, 1966). Parental messages were constructed to contain cliches, warnings, value judgements; Adult messages reflected rational thought and logic; Child messages were concerned with play, immediate gratification and sensory appeals. In regard to bi-mode messages, two such categories were jointly mixed. Candidate messages were judged by five raters, and were selected according to majority agreement.

Data was obtained from 215 students at the University of Texas. Each was administered the Personality Mode Test, followed by the message test. Data was coded and processed through a conservative correlation analysis using Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients, to determine strength of association, with $p < .05$ as criteria, between message and personality type.

Results

In regard to the Personality Mode Test, a three-factor solution was obtained through factor analysis. The principle-axis analysis accounted for 30% of the Trace, but only 40.4% was extracted by the three roots. Variables and factors are shown in Table I. Factor names are arbitrary.

TABLE I

THREE-FACTOR SOLUTION OF BERNE PERSONALITY MODEL

Loading	Statement
	Factor I. Social Evaluative (Parent)
.80	America's not perfect, but it's about as close as we can get
.75	I favor strict enforcement of all laws
.74	The U.S. should be the most powerful country in the world
.65	An insult to honor should never go unpunished
.61	Obedience and respect for authority are important virtues for children
.61	I don't like modern art
.59	Large companies are essential for our nation's growth
.56	Individuals against churches and religion shouldn't teach college
.44	I have strong ethical standards which I follow closely
	Factor II. Emotiveness (Child)
.70	I frequently worry
.68	I have little influence over what happens to me
.62	I'm sometimes happy, sometimes sad, with no reason
.56	I feel I can't do anything right
.56	I get the feeling that life is not very useful
.54	I'm often tired even if I've done nothing to justify it
.51	I often get mad when things don't turn out as planned
.49	I often feel self-conscious in the presence of superiors
-.45	My life is interesting, yet calm
	Factor III. Controlled Rationality (Adult)
.65	It is important to do pretty much as I please
.63	I am responsible for my own problems
.61	I feel I recognize when my emotions carry me along
.57	A good parent is kind, considerate, tender and sensitive
.57	It is better to be your own boss
.52	I have a warm emotional relationship with others
.50	Most people are honest because they're afraid of getting caught
-.42	Homosexuals should be severely punished
.41	I feel sorry for the disadvantaged
.37	A common international currency is desirable

One useful method of determining the amount of reliability of a test is computed and reported by an Alpha coefficient. Table II shows the results of computation of the Alpha coefficient of reliability for each scale, plus the test as a whole.

TABLE II

ALPHA COEFFICIENTS OF RELIABILITY OF ITEM ASSIGNMENT

Scale	R (Alpha)
Parent	.77
Adult	.63
Child	.69
Overall R	.78

Undertaken next, and reported in Table III, was a rank-order correlation of personality modes with message modes, using an n of 215.

TABLE III

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION COMPARISON OF PERSONALITY MODE WITH MESSAGE MODE

Personality	Messages (Spearman rank-order coefficient)					
	Parent	Child	Adult	Parent-Child	Parent-Adult	Child-Adult
Parent	.20*	-.15	.02	.31*	-.20*	-.03
Child	-.09	.34*	-.24*	-.07	.05	-.03
Adult	.14	-.21*	.04	-.04	.23*	-.18*

*p $\leq$ .05, n = 215.

For Parent personalities, the largest single association was with the Parent-Child message, with a low but significant correlation value of .31. The next largest significant correlations for Parent personalities were .20 with Parent messages, and -.20 with Parent-Adult messages.

For Child personalities, a significant relationship, but low, was reported for Child messages (.34), while a low but significant inverse relationship was found for Adult messages (-.24).

For Adult personalities, a low but significant relation was found with Parent-Adult messages (.23) and low, inverse relationships were found with Child messages (-.21) and Child-Adult messages (-.18).

These data would tend to confirm that certain significant relationships occur between certain messages and personality types, across products.

Discussion

The results of this inquiry would suggest that message categories in terms of the Berne model hold promise of being realistic and useful. It must be kept in mind, however, that message choice behavior reflected in data here was merely verbal behavior, not real-world behavior. As such, the findings can only be viewed as suggestive; replication through additional studies must be made.

One major implication of the data is the negative effects of certain messages upon differing personalities. The rejection of Parent-Adult messages by Parent personalities, the avoidance of Adult messages by Child personalities and the avoidance of Child messages by Adult personalities seems fairly clear.

In summary, one may state that the most useful feature of the Berne model lies with its simplicity, and a certain intuitive clarity of focus. From this would appear to flow creative implications for the advertising practioner, as well as providing theoretical implications to the communications researcher.

APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL
ALPHA COEFFICIENTS

Scale	R (Alpha)
Parent	.85
Child	.73
Adult	.79
Overall R	.76

APPENDIX B

FINAL PERSONALITY MODE TEST, WITH SCORING KEY
(Thirty Items)

OPINION STATEMENT SET

Instructions: This questionnaire is comprised of various st tements, with which some people will agree and others disagree. Please give us your own opinion about each statement by placing an "X" in the appropriate blank. Please do not skip any. Work at a fast, yet comfortable pace. We are seeking your first impression.

Example:

	Most Strongly Agree			(?)			Most Strongly Disagree
War is inherent in human nature.	____	____	____	____	____	____	X

In this example, it was indicated that you most strongly disagreed with the statement. Of course, if you weren't sure, or if you felt neutral, you would have marked the center space indicated by the (?).

Now that you have the idea, jot down your age and sex, and begin. There is no time limit.

Your AGE:____
Your SEX:____

	Most Strongly Agree			(?)			Most Strongly Disagree
1. A common international currency is desirable.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
2. Individuals who are against churches and religion should not be allowed to teach in college.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
3. America may not be perfect, but the American Way has brought us about as close as human beings can get to a perfect society.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
4. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
5. I feel it is important to be able to do pretty much as I please.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
6. Most people are not really honest for a desirable reason; they're afraid of getting caught.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
7. I get the feeling that life is not very useful.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
8. My life, all things even, is fairly interesting, yet calm.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
9. A good parent is kind, consistent, tender, sensitive and always aware a child is master of its own soul.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
10. I often get mad when things don't turn out as planned.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____

PLEASE TURN TO NEXT PAGE

		Most Strongly Agree			(?)			Most Strongly Disagree
11.	I frequently find myself worrying about something.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
12.	I feel that I can't do anything right.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
13.	I feel sorry for the disadvantaged to the point that I am outraged and intolerant of prejudiced people.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
14.	It is better to be your own boss.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
15.	Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
16.	Homosexuals should be severely punished.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
17.	I sometimes feel happy, sometimes sad, without any apparent reason.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
18.	The United States should be the most powerful country in the world.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
19.	I'm often tired even if I've done nothing to justify it.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
20.	I worry too long over humiliating experiences.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
21.	I am in favor of a very strict enforcement of all laws.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
22.	I feel that I'm emotionally mature enough to recognize when my emotions carry me along.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
23.	Large companies seem to be essential for our nation's growth and expansion.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
24.	If civilization is to survive, there must be a turning back to religion.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
25.	I have a warm emotional relationship with others.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
26.	I often feel self-conscious in the presence of superiors.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
27.	I have strong ethical standards which I follow closely.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
28.	I don't like modern art.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
29.	I am responsible for my own problems.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____
30.	An insult to honor should never go unpunished.	____	____	____	____	____	____	____

PERSONALITY MODE SCORING KEY

Item No.	Mode Assignment
1	Parent
2	Parent
3	Parent
4	Child
5	Adult
6	Adult
7	Child
8	Child (negative)
9	Adult
10	Child
11	Child
12	Child
13	Adult
14	Adult
15	Parent
16	Adult (negative)
17	Child
18	Parent
19	Child
20	Child
21	Parent
22	Adult
23	Parent
24	Parent
25	Adult
26	Child
27	Adult
28	Parent
29	Adult
30	Parent

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